

Lawyer Leon Charney says he met Arafat to seek release of prisoners

By WOLF BLITZER/Jerusalem Post Correspondent

WASHINGTON - A prominent New York lawyer, Leon Charney, disclosed yesterday that he met with PLO chairman Yasser Arafat in Tunis last June to try to win the release of Israeli soldiers missing or held prisoner in Lebanon.

Charney said several senior Israeli ministers - whom he declined to name - were briefed on his three-and-one-half hour meeting with Arafat. The session was organized by Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab doctor who has recently acted as an intermediary between Israel and the PLO. Tibi was also in Tunis, but did not participate in the meeting.

"I was invited to meet with Chairman Arafat," said Charney in a telephone interview while vacationing in South Florida. "After declining once, I decided to go. My purpose was strictly humanitarian. I hoped to get some information about Israeli PoWs."

Charney, who is a close friend of Ezer Weizman, Yitzhak Rabin, Haim Bar-Lev and other Israeli politicians, said the decision to go to Tunis was "an important one, since top Israeli officials informed me it was the government's policy to use any means possible to free the Israeli PoWs."

Charney said that Arafat promised to provide some information about the fate of the Israeli soldiers, but he did not.

According to Charney, Arafat asked for the meeting after learning of Charney's behind-the-scenes role during the Camp David peace process between Israel and Egypt. At the time, Charney served as an unofficial link between then-Defense Minister Weizman and President Jimmy Carter.

Moscow has nothing to contribute towards elections in areas - Arens

By DAVID MAKOVSKY

The Soviets have nothing to contribute to the diplomatic effort aimed at holding elections in the West Bank, Foreign Minister Moshe Arens yesterday told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee yesterday.

Suggesting lack of Soviet interest in the idea of elections, Arens said that the Soviet Union supports the convening of an international peace conference, an idea that is anathema to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

Strenuous diplomatic efforts have been made on several continents during the past few months to get the Soviets to agree to elections. In Mal-

ta recently, U.S. President George Bush said there was little difference between the U.S. and Soviet positions on the Middle East.

Arens's remarks do not necessarily suggest that the Soviets would seek to obstruct the elections process.

He said the current diplomatic impasse revolves essentially around two assurances that Israel is seeking from the U.S.: the composition of the Palestinian delegation to an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and the agenda of the talks.

The U.S. has already indicated that it would be ready not to force Israel to negotiate with the PLO.